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Which language? Which culture? Which pedagogy? A study of Mandarin Chinese teachers' perceptions of their professional self in a British school context

by

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Which language? Which culture? Which pedagogy? A study of Mandarin Chinese teachers' perceptions of their professional self in a British school context

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Abstract

This study is directly influenced by the recent sudden and rapid increase in the interest and demand of Mandarin provision across schools in the UK. The shortage of teachers and a negative climate of language learning have resulted in a knee-jerk reaction in which the importation of language and language teachers is in danger of imposing unproblematised assumptions upon the notions of language, culture and pedagogy. This research looks into the ideological conceptualisation of Mandarin teaching in British schools through the eyes of teachers of Mandarin. Taking stock of TESOL methodology and my position as a Mandarin teacher, I draw on the abundant narratives of fellow teachers to investigate how their perceptions of professional self construct the world of Mandarin teaching in which an intersection of conflicting and competing discourses suggest enduring problems in teacher training for Mandarin teachers in the UK.

1. Introduction and Research Background

In May 2007, the Independent revealed that SSAT (the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust) and China's Hanban (National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language) agreed to have 200 teachers sent from China each year to teach Mandarin in British schools (The Independent, 2007a). In the same breath, Taiwan and the southwest regional government have also sealed a deal to introduce Taiwanese teachers to Specialist Language Colleges in that area (www.//english.moe.gov.tw). In view of the demand for more teachers from the rapid growth of Mandarin learning in schools with prediction for more pupil take-up and new provision (CILT, 2007), one may feel pleased to see such initiatives taking place to ease the teacher shortage. However, there seem important questions unasked: Who are teaching Mandarin in this country? What language knowledge and teaching skills do they bring with them? How can these diverse resources be harnessed for the British education?

The current teaching of Mandarin is best summarized, in Pachler's (2007) sense of words, a "knee-jerk reaction", to China's soaring status against the climate of "negativity" in Britain's language education. As the world's fastest growing economy, China's image as a new power has prompted a global thirst for its language and culture (see Appendix1), with allegedly 40 million people learning Mandarin worldwide and a forecast to increase to 100 million by the end of this decade (Wang & Higgins, 2008; the Independent, 2006). This heat-wave of Mandarin, however, is met with a gloomy picture of language decline in Britain, a "negativity" that is rooted in the lack of ideological or pragmatic thinking in the British vision of language education (Pachler, 2007), which manifests in a combination of recent language policy shift

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and a general reluctance to engage in language learning dwelled in "the island mentality" (Watts, 2004), despite the government's attempt to ascertain the economic and sociocultural benefit of linguistic diversity (Nuffield, 2000; DfES, 2002a).

Based on a narrow notion of linguistic performance modelled on an "ideal native speaker" and standards and achievement measured in numerical terms, language education in Britain shows little movement towards concepts of multilingualism and plurilingualism that aim to, via the development of an integrated linguistic and intercultural communicative competence in language learning, provide young people with citizenship education to reduce the linguistic and cultural "otherness" resulted from the political and societal insularity (Pachler, 2007). The consequent translation of the government's commitment for opportunity and entitlement to languages into the discontinuation, or, disapplication of Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) as a curriculum requirement for pupils aged 14 (DfES, 2002b) does little but undermining MFL in schools, arousing further decrease in and negative attitudes towards language learning in general (Pachler, 2002, 2007; Watts, 2004). Meanwhile, the articulation of the language policy in the mandatory National Curriculum (NC) of MFL, as observed by Pachler (2007: 4), is also questionable for its "systematic weakness" in "the effectiveness and fitness for purpose, and meta-pragmatics, the beliefs, views and perceptions, of language use in the real world" and its impact on curriculum time, assessment and methodology as well as teachers' professional autonomy.

Clearly, in addition to teacher shortage, there is a serious problem with curriculum preparedness for Mandarin in all aspects, from the capacity of an already squeezed MFL to accommodate it in schools, to the mentality behind how it is positioned in NC and education and society at large. Despite these tests that the arguably flimsy framework of language teaching has to take, Mandarin is notably expanding in British schools. This trend, set off by the China heat and the introduction of Mandarin into the non-state school curriculum spun up by the media (see Appendix1), together with China's active promotion of its official language in Britain (http://english.hanban.edu.cn), has been well received in the light of a national language crisis the country has found itself in. However, the potential side effects of this trend are not to be underestimated, given that much of the institutional attention is drawn towards a particular political economic direction. In other words, we are confronted with an overwhelming China-centred discourse about a particular notion of language prototype, and an elitist tendency of its development by its token position as celebrated educational success in private schools or as China-Britain bilateral cooperation, such as the recent establishment of a Confucius Institute and 5 hubs within SSAT (The Independent, 2007b). Such a discourse inevitably favours certain assumptions about what Mandarin education should be in Britain over others and further problematises the questions posed earlier.

Linking this with the Mandarin teacher influx, what I gather about Mandarin teaching in schools seems to be a rather simplistic demand-supply approach in which language is imported as pre-packaged commodity and language teachers as readily usable pedagogical instruments, accompanying an unproblematised assumption about the complex issue of language, ethnicity and nationality in Mandarin teaching. On the other hand, being a Mandarin teacher myself, especially as a researcher for the Survey of Chinese Language Teaching in Britain initiated by Hanban (2007) last year, the reality I witness often appears quite the opposite. The population of teachers, the understanding of the language, and the way it is taught seem highly hybrid. Notwithstanding stories of success, what I hear from fellow teachers suggests confusions, frustrations and tensions in the individuals' trajectories of language teaching in British schools, which direct me again to the questions asked above.

It is with all the above interests that I conduct this study, which sets out to consider, through Mandarin teachers' perceptions of their professional self, how Mandarin teaching is conceptualised in British schools, that is, to construct an ideological representation of Mandarin teaching by rationalizing teachers' professional thinking and practice, which helps answer the essential questions of which language, which culture and which pedagogy Mandarin teaching entails in the specific context of British schools, before we can formulate a coherent set of principles that hinges Mandarin curriculum and teacher education based on this understanding with the socio-political discourses of language education at a meso and macro level. To do so, I intend to draw on abundant narratives afforded by fellow Mandarin teachers, i.e., conversations I had with or heard from them about their teaching on various informal occasions, as fecund resources for research. Borrowing Schostak's (2006) notion of "anecdote" around which events, meanings and judgements are organised and constructed, I rely on teachers' accidental talks to identify issues and interpret them retrospectively against literature concerned. Hence for the purpose of this study, the theoretical framework is elected and synthesised by the way narratives are constructed. It is therefore necessary to clarify the research methodology before presenting a literature review.

2. Research Methodology

This research set off with a basic definition of teachers' perceptions of professional self and how narrative inquiry offers a possibility to explore it by means of anecdotes. These constructs are discussed here, with issues of research design. Thematic topics of the narratives are also explained.

2.1 Framing Teachers' Perceptions of Professional Self

Teachers' perceptions of professional self in this study is taken as the professional identity of a teacher, that is, the way teachers define themselves vis-à-vis the subject they teach, the pedagogy they deploy and the context in which their teaching takes place. As asserted by MacLure (1993), teachers' identity claims can be seen as "a form of *argument* – as devices for justifying, explaining and making sense of one's conduct, career, values and circumstances (original emphasis)" (p. 316). This encapsulates the way identity is framed by poststructuralism and discourse theory in which it is constructed by a two-way structuration between the power of social given and individuals' active location within the societal system (Giddens, 1984; Coldron & Smith, 1999; Norton, 2000; Block, 2006 & 2007). Teachers' identity, from this perspective, is the result of social conditioning rendered by specific educational "traditions" (MacIntyre, 1981) or norms as well as a personal trajectory of socialization to arrive at enhanced professional knowledge and an empowered social being (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992; Carter, 1993). In this process, teacher identity is about "orientating" and "becoming" that is complex, fragmented, hybrid, and forever-changing rather than an essentialized notion of a static, fixed or coherent set of traits (Norton, 2000; Blommaert, 2005; Block, 2006; Alsup, 2005).

Therefore inquiring into teachers' identity is of multiple benefits. It serves as an immediate lens through which teachers' educational "habitus" (Bourdieu, 1977), i.e., the way "knowledge, opinions and values a teacher holds about his or her professional activities" are achieved, maintained, and developed (Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1994: 47), can be understood. The interactionist and constructionist notion of self adds support to the way teachers make sense of their professional situations which conversely allows interpretation of

educational practices locally and in society at large. This dual-directional engagement intermeshes with other cognitive and social theories of teacher learning and development and contributes to broader knowledge creation through understanding human actions and social policy (Dewey, 1938; Shulman, 1986; Vygotsky, 1987; Lave, 1988; Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, 1996; Lantolf, 2000; Tsui, 2003, etc.). It is within this framework that this study is situated.

2.2 Narrative and Anecdote

Narrative inquiry reflects the epistemological and philosophical theory that we as humans are essentially story-telling creatures and we learn from our life experience and our reflection on it (Dewey, 1938; Fisher, 1987, 1992). Narrative is thought to come closer to encapsulating our experiences in the world than the conventional scientific approaches (Carter, 1993). As Clandinin & Connelly (1994) observes, "narrative names the structured quality of experience to be studied, and it names the patterns of inquiry for its study" (p. 416). To them, narrative is both content and method as it formulates our personal experience and extracts meaning out of the experience.

In educational research, "narrative is indispensable not only for individual experiences, but also for our understanding of our own identities and those of others" (Kanno, 2003:9). It enables us to anchor personal experience in a social domain so as to construct meaning about our relationship with the world (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000). As Johnson and Golombek (2002) argue cogently, "…narrative inquiry, conducted by teachers individually or collaboratively, tells the stories of teachers' professional development within their own professional worlds. Such inquiry is driven by teachers' inner desire to understand that experience, to reconcile what is known with that which is hidden, to confirm and affirm, and to construct and reconstruct understanding of themselves as teachers and of their own teaching" (p. 6). Hence narrative inquiry serves a useful instrument for the current study to uncover Mandarin teachers' perceptions of professional self.

For this study, it is particular relevant to refer to the notion of "anecdote" (Schostak, 2006) as a way to present narratives, an infrastructure in which discursive actions of articulation serves as structurality that gives experience a temporal structure and meaning. Anecdotes therefore offer a unifying narrative that brings together a plurivocity of identities in relation to an intersection of discourses. Far from being trivial and unempirical, anecdote is seen as case record that is "logical, structural, [and] relational" (p. 144); it is both the content and the method that enables an understanding that is less imposed than scientific procedures of individuals' positioning in the multiple worlds of everyday life. As Schostak (2006) asserts, it is "[t]hrough the collection and analysis of anecdotes [that] the dynamic, multi-dimensional and multi-layered narrative frameworks through which everyday and professional experience and action is organized can be studied" (p. 145). The validity of anecdotes is also supported by the notion of "small stories" in narrative inquiry which draws attention to "snippets of talk that flouted expectations of the canon" (Georgakopoulou, 2006:123; see also Bamberg, 2006). Within a dialogical and discursive framework, what distinguishes small stories from the traditional narrative is that it is self-elected reflection rather than theory that defines identity.

2.3 Research Design

The "anecdote" approach allows me, without composed setup, to examine freely over a period of time talks that "take[] on a shape, a meaning, retrospectively in terms of what it will have

become at some future date" (Schostak, 2006:143). By freely, I mean my role, often in co-constructing an anecdote as a listener or interlocutor, removes the centrality of a researcher and lends support to maintaining the genuineness of each narrative so that individuals' voice speaks for themselves. I believe this is the best way to give a true resemblance of teachers' perceptions of professional self and therefore the best way to approach the reality of Mandarin teaching. This was supplemented by interviews I conducted with teachers for the Hanban (2007) survey. Meanwhile, I was careful to make sure that the purpose of my project has been explained to and consent sought from all potential informants.

Although the research is largely generated from undirected talks, within the scope of this study, I choose to focus on three thematic topics surfacing from a corpus of narratives that are relevant to the research questions: teachers' perceptions of their Chinese expert status, standardisation in Mandarin, and the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) pedagogy in schools. Limited by space, I draw on talks in these areas from four teachers who I had good rapport and regular contact with. The choice is also based on their diverging backgrounds, as I consider similarities extrapolated from disparate sources are more representative therefore afford more generalisation. It is these shared visions of professionalism that defines the "community of practice" (Wenger, 1998) for Mandarin teachers and generates a discourse from the teachers' perspective that facilitates personal and professional development. A brief biography of these teachers is attached in the Appendix. Pseudonym names are given to protect their privacy.

Finally, for recording the narratives, I consider my responsibility lie in my effort to re-present them in the most realistic way (Schostak, 2006). As the narratives are mostly anecdotal flashbacks, it is not always possible to record the talks in precise detail to include dialogical features such as pause, emphasis or accompanying actions or emotions. This is perhaps problematic for turning the data analysis into "textual transmission" (Blommaert, 2006) that misinterprets texts out of their original contexts. However, I consider three strategies that may counteract this shortcoming. First, the narratives organise themselves into shared thematic topics, which offers broad contextual structures. Secondly, as most of the conversations took place in Mandarin, it is decided that all narratives are written in Mandarin in what I see as the closest to the original and realistic style and translations are provided for the purpose of discussion. Full records of these are attached in the Appendix. For the ease of reading, the English versions are given in the main body of the essay. Thirdly, I associate myself with what Schostak (2006) describes as "consciousness of the actors" and to "sensually, intellectually and emotionally [construct] the world" (p. 149) i.e., to try to interpret in the speakers' own ways of seeing. This in one way is enabled by the shared profession of Mandarin teaching between me and the informants; in the other, it rests with the trusting relationship I have with them as a personal friend, a peer professional and a researcher with genuine interest in understanding their world.

3. Literature Review

As explained above, the theoretical framework for this study is generated from the anecdotal narratives arising from the everyday teaching and living of Mandarin teachers, which fall into three thematic topics: teachers' perceptions of their Chinese expert status, standardisation in Mandarin, and the CLT pedagogy in schools. Here I review literature in these areas accordingly, taking stock from theories and research in English Language Teaching (ELT).

3.1 Teachers and the Chinese Expert Status

Research of teachers' identity as experts of the language of instruction is initiated by the native-nonnative dichotomy in ELT for understanding the linguistic, social and cultural identities of nonnative teachers of English (Medgyes, 1992; Amin, 1997; Tang, 1997; Duff & Uchida, 1997). The wide concerns about the identity crisis of nonnative educators are centred on the issue of their expert status being subjected to overstressed language proficiency, stereotypes of and discrimination against their racial and ethnic backgrounds and the linguistic imperialism and social hegemonism it projects (Braine, 1999; Kachru, 1996; Kubota, 2001; Woolard, 1994; Thomas et al., 2004). Phillipson (1992) labels the superior claim of native teacher status as a "fallacy". Yet, as Canagarajah (1999) contends, this fallacy functions not only at a linguistic level, defying the diverse variants of English in multilingual contexts and giving rise to purification and standardisation of the dominant speech; it also legitimizes a Centre-Periphery division based on political economy that ultimately risks diminishing ELT expertise by forcing nonnative teachers to focus on superficial linguistic dimension of teaching, such as accent and pronunciation, at the price of development in pedagogical effectiveness.

What the "native speaker fallacy" offers for this study is an insight into the assumed teaching expertise based on ethnicity and race, as Amin (1999) asserts that alongside gender, race and accents related to race, i.e., White and White accents endowed native teacher status, evoke prejudices among ELT teachers. The mindset behind this illustrates an ideological formula in which a particular ethnicity indexes a speaker of a particular language, which then indexes a knower of that language, i.e., teaching expertise. This association reflects a categorical grouping of a language community based on ethnicity (Blommaert, 2005) that finds source in Le Page and Tabouret-Keller's (1985: 234) equation "a race = a culture = a language". Such is a totalist "othering", like the "lumped category" of "Chinese", argues Blommaert (2005: 207), which results easily from temporal spatial distance and produces a stereotype. Indeed, as pointed out by Sun (2006), the word "Chinese" in English corresponds to several social and cultural nuances, including nationality, ethnicity, culture and language, which are in fact expressed very differently in Chinese. Yet the vast complex of values and practices are somewhat blanketed over and simplified by the umbrella term "Chinese" in English, which unavoidably induces a singular ethnolinguistic image for that part of the world. Meanwhile, the stereotypical link of ethnicity and language construes an extended assumption about the pedagogical expertise of a native speaker, which is equally problematic. Theorists posit that the linguistic and pedagogical authority guaranteed by native speakership is an idealized abstraction (Braine, 1999; Kramsch, 1997) hence "not all speakers may make good teachers of their first language" without "complex pedagogical preparation and practice" (Canagarajah, 1999: 80). This view is in parallel with what Shulman (1986) calls the "missing paradigm" in his theory of teacher knowledge, which argues that teachers' disciplinary knowledge is the indispensable base of pedagogical skills; it is this knowledge of the subject matter, coupled with the pedagogical content knowledge for transforming an intuitive or personal understanding of the subject matter into teachable representations that are accessible to students, that makes a successful teacher. Tsui (2003) further emphasises the subject-specific nature of pedagogical content knowledge, which is governed by the nature of the discipline and curriculum content. Hence teachers' expertise in subject content knowledge "often has a decisive influence on the process, content, and quality of their instruction" (ibid: 55). In this light, a Mandarin speaker will only become a Mandarin teacher when they are conversant in both the subject matter and pedagogical content knowledge of the language.

Thus language teachers' perceptions of their expert status are not simply quantifiable qualifications or training programmes they are given; they are a sense of professional credibility and authenticity mediated by language ideologies which, as witnessed in ELT, bear arguably inevitable stereotypes that may cause marginalization and discrimination for some, but convenience and advantage for others. For interpreting Mandarin teachers' perceptions of their expertise, it is important to draw on conceptions of language, ethnicity, native speaker, and teacher knowledge to see how these concurrently mould teachers' professional identities.

3.2 Teachers and Standardisation in Mandarin

Another aspect of language teachers' professional identity is to do with their "attitudes towards and affective connection to a language, dialect or sociolect" (Block, 2006: 36). This, realised in the current study, is the way teachers respond to notions such as accent, variation, dialect, and, in particular, standardisation of the language they teach, which are the instantaneous indexical markers for composing individual and group identities and carry particular weight in education (Blommaert, 2005).

Like Received Pronunciation and variations in English, standardisation codifies the language use of certain regional or social groups with imposed norms that invalidate other varieties through "the maintenance of moral, social and institutional order" even though it has little "logic" or "correctness" (Thomas, et al. 2004: 190). Sociolinguists observe that standardisation is an orientation towards a nationalistic monolingual ideology that emphasises "the homogeneity, uniformity and territorial boundedness" of language (Blommaert, 2005: 216; cf. Thomas, 1991). As asserted by Blackledge (2005: 34), "[t]he official language or standard variety becomes the language of hegemonic institutions because the dominant and the subordinate group both misrecognise it as a superior language". The prestige of a particular variety conferred by standardisation forms a hierarchical system of inequality attributed by values of language use in which memberships of particular groups are created (Blommaert, 2005). It, at the same time, lays down the "normative literacy conventions" (p. 212) in education.

Mandarin as a linguistic and social construct is closely linked to standardisation. Its superiority is grounded in the geographical, cultural, historical and political complexity of Chinese society. A longstanding debate impacting on this surrounds the discrepancy between the Chinese and Western dialect-language distinction and two contrasting concepts as a result (Bloomfield, 1933; DeFrancise, 1984; Ramsey, 1987; Norman, 1988; Bradley, 1992; Fromkin & Rodman, 1993; Xing, 2006). Whilst a Eurocentric viewpoint classifies Chinese as a group of languages with various degrees of mutual unintelligibility and Mandarin as a *lingua franca,* for Chinese society, Mandarin is the official standard variety of Chinese as a unity of regional dialects (ibid). The engineering power beneath the supremacy of Mandarin is multifaceted. It is above all determined by "the profound unity of Chinese culture that has been transmitted in an unbroken line" (Norman, 1988: 1). This "unique" condition (DeFrancis, 1984) facilitates the desire for a common cultural heritage by which the Chinese are united as a people and their shared written language is the most iconic and powerful symbol of that unity (ibid; Ramsey, 1987; Norman, 1988). As Sun (2006: 8) observes, those Chinese who cannot converse meaningfully can easily communicate in writing, "which creates a common, solidifying, and profound cultural bond among all Chinese dialect speakers". The state reforms of language as part of China's westernization scheme since early last century officialised Mandarin, with stipulated pronunciation and grammar based on northern Chinese, as the standard spoken language of the country (DeFrancis, 1984).

The "one nation, one culture, one language" mentality continues to influence the use of Mandarin in modern days. Although linguistic variations and multiple practices are observed between China, Taiwan and Singapore as well as within the broad geography of China (Bradley, 1992; Cheung, 1985; Li, 2004), the dominance of northern Mandarin is widely present. Yet, as Li (2004) laments, a real emphasis on *the* Beijing accent as the authentic and pure form of Mandarin surfaces from the language policy of mainland China and steers the standardisation of Chinese towards "linguistic purism" (Thomas, 1991) that advocates the supremacy of a particularly-defined form of language through central state control so as to ascertain the cultural identity of "Chineseness" (Li, 2004). In view of the historical and contemporary development of Mandarin, he contends that standardisation in Chinese represents the interplay of a complex of emotions and mentalities that are fundamentally rooted in the national sentiment of unity and identity insecurity caused by the conflicts between the nostalgia of China's golden past and an attempt for modernization. In this sense, standardisation is an expression of nationalism that places ethnicity based on common history and culture at the centre of language identity and creates xenophobic resistance against the undesirables as the non-standard.

Effectively, standardisation has reshaped the spoken and written forms of Chinese. It nevertheless is met with unity and division. Orally, a common yardstick is provided by the Beijing accent that forms the base of Mandarin, albeit two versions of characters and Romanization systems in writing appeared since the political separation, with simplified characters and *pinyin* used in mainland China and traditional characters and *zhuyinfuhao* in Taiwan (Bradley, 1992; DeFrancis, 1984). In Mandarin teaching, teacher identity is influenced by differences in accents and characters brought about by standardisation which, for Yang (2008) as a Taiwanese teacher, evokes the feeling of being othered as a "nonnative speaker".

Hence standardisation in Chinese embodied in Mandarin is an ideologically loaded paradox in which historical tradition, cultural norm and political power co-construct a complex of sociocultural structure that defines individuals' identity. On one hand, standardisation foregrounds a state-promoted "nationalistically motivated linguistic purism" (Thomas, 1991: 52) that connects itself to notions of homogeneity, correctness, elitism, nativeness and hegemonism. On the other, it is situated amongst sophisticated and diverse language practices in Chinese. It is between these tensions that teachers of Mandarin construct their professional identities.

3.3 Teachers and the CLT Pedagogy in Schools

Language teachers' identity also exhibits in their dealings with the "culture of learning" (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996), i.e., differing traditions, values, beliefs and expectations that problematizes teaching and learning (Thorp; 1991; Pennycook, 1998) and impacts on the construction of individuals' social and educational identities (Wu, 2006; Fitch & Morgan, 2003; Cortazzi & Jin, 2002, etc.). In this study, Mandarin teachers' perceptions of professional self are related to the cultural and pedagogical issues in the CLT-based language teaching and especially the NC of MFL in British schools.

Broadly speaking, differences in the culture of learning in a Mandarin language classroom are outlined by the contrast of the communicative approach underscored in ELT, which values student-centered acquisition of language skills with teachers being helpers, facilitators,

observers and participants in the classroom (Harmer, 2001; Ellis, 1996), *versus* a teacher-centred and knowledge-based Confucian model in which teachers are perceived to be the source and authority of knowledge, and rote-learning and memorisation are deemed a serious endeavour that eventually leads to success (Liu, 1986; Jin & Cortazzi, 2006). The two educational cultures are not necessarily polarised as good or bad learning, as many reason the value of certain aspects of the Chinese concept of learning that CLT may not agree with. For instance, Leung (2001) argues for the true essence of rote-learning as understanding through memorisation and taking pleasure *in* learning; Li (2001) stresses that Chinese learners possess greater inner motivation and diligence for achievement; Jin & Cortazzi (2006) draws attention to the teacher expertise of being the leader and model in learning. However, in the field of language teaching and teacher training, the dominance of the CLT-orientated culture and methodology permeates the practice (Canagarajah, 1999; Liu, 1999) and shapes the cultural and professional identities of "non-CLT" teachers (Cummins, 1996; Duff & Uchida, 1997; Braine, 1999; etc.).

In language teaching in British schools, CLT is manifested in the NC of MFL, which is criticised for having "an overemphasis on speaking and the proscription of grammar teaching" (Block, 2005: 175) and "tend[ing] to neglect the generative potential of language by downplaying awareness of and knowledge about language by focussing too narrowly on transactional, situationalised language in narrowly defined contexts and idealised discourse patterns" (Pachler, 2000: 34). The particular version of CLT represented in Britain's NC, as arose from Block's (2001, 2005) studies of the personal and professional identities of foreign MFL teachers, underlines the politics of egalitarianism with an overemphasis on child-centredness which, according to these teachers, are accountable for issues such as poor learner discipline, motivation, and achievement. Such tensions are no less problematic in Mandarin teaching given the disparities in the culture of learning outlined above. On the other hand, the NC entails potential pedagogical deficiency in literacy instruction in Chinese, as I have argued based on a Mandarin teacher's experience in a British school (Wang, 2008). This is supported by evidence from cognitive research of character acquisition in Mandarin teaching, which suggests that for non-cognate language speakers, not only more curriculum time is needed, but vigorous strategies like rote-learning and memorisation are necessary to master the complex and intricate linguistic knowledge of the Chinese orthography (see Chang, 1987; Packard, 1990; Everson, 1994, 1996 & 1998; Ke, 1996; 1998a, 1998b). Though not advocated by NC or CLT in general, literacy acquisition in Chinese invites reassessment of those seemingly old-fashioned teaching methodologies as well as the merit of alternative conceptualisations of learning, a judgment mirrored in Yang's (2008) reflection on an improved understanding of the Chinese culture of learning stemming from unexpected learner demand for rote-learning and memorisation for character learning in an American university.

The cultural and pedagogical dilemmas sketched here provide good reference for understanding the way Mandarin teachers interact with the methodology in British schools to achieve a sense of professional self.

4. Analysing Narratives

I report here the narratives of four Mandarin teachers. As explained earlier, these talks fall into three thematic topics, reflecting what they have to say about their expertise, language and pedagogy. These are staged below and analysed in the light of the literature review.

4.1 Concerns about Expertise

The teachers speak frequently of their knowledge of Mandarin in relation to teaching. Interestingly, regardless of their differing backgrounds, there is a general consensus of a lack of language expertise. This was first detected in TG's confession of his frustration with his Mandarin while we were chatting in English about Mandarin teaching.

Sorry can we switch to Mandarin? I want to have the chance to speak it more. Otherwise I will forget it all. At home? I at most speak a bit Cantonese. I get by in Mandarin. Really my Mandarin is quite poor. I am the only Chinese in my school. My boss got hold of me and I can't do much about it. I feel as if I was cheating. Ha, cheating! It's true. I don't really read or write characters. I don't know what to teach. What do you teach them? I have no idea. How frustrating (shaking his head).

(Vignette 1, TG, June 2007)

TG's talk displays an acute sense of dissatisfaction and insecurity with his Mandarin, which he first describes as "get by" in terms of everyday communication, further as "really quite poor" when referring to reading or writing characters and, finally, downgrades to "having no idea" in teaching. A key reason for this can be attributed to the circumstance in which TG became a Mandarin teacher: he is "the only Chinese" at school, so the headteacher "got hold of" him. The appointment by default reveals two problems. On one hand, it suggests an assumption of TG's teaching expertise based on his status as a speaker of Mandarin. As discussed earlier, a language speaker does not make a language teacher without pedagogical training and practice (Canagarajah, 1999). Although TG may have the intuitive knowledge of Mandarin, he clearly is not equipped with the teachable knowledge of the subject (Shulman, 1986). His QTS status as an English teacher provides him with general but not Mandarin-specific pedagogical skills (Tsui, 2003), hence his feeling of inadequacy, so much so that he calls himself "cheating". The self-despair is, on the other hand, due to the failure to peel the ethnic cover off his linguistic knowledge. In other words, there seems a degree of automatic acceptance of his competence in Mandarin because of his Chinese ethnicity, i.e., a Chinese face may mark a native Mandarin speaker, which may mark a teacher of Mandarin, a supposition held by the school and TG himself as he feels that he "can't do much about it". In fact, TG's ethnicity has disguised his "truncated competence" (Blommaert et al. 2005) as a trilingual speaker of English, Cantonese and Mandarin, in which his linguistic skills are organized and enabled by the social environment he is immersed in rather than full competence in each. Comparing to the other two languages, as TG admits, Mandarin is perhaps the least used therefore he feels the least confident in it. It is also of higher competence in certain social domains, such as the casual conversation shown here, than others, such as teaching it in the classroom, notwithstanding that he has limited literacy skills. TG's frustration with the predicament he is in is in fact a consequence of the stereotypical link between ethnicity and language. Nevertheless his urgent need for the language expertise is unmistakable here as he disqualifies himself as a teacher by the label of cheat.

The lack of specific knowledge in Mandarin is expressed more explicitly from the Taiwanese teacher CS. Her talk about *pinyin* and simplified characters was triggered when I noticed a self-made copy of reference of these above her desk at work.

This way I will recognise pinyin very quickly. Pinyin is not really difficult, but it was not taught on our PGCE course, so I have to teach myself. The same is with simplified characters. But I take it easy and it's fine. We are supposed to follow the textbook anyway, so generally speaking there is no problem.

(Vignette 2, CS, October 2007)

As discussed earlier, standardisation and political division of China and Taiwan have effectuated two varieties of characters and Romanization codes in the Chinese writing system. Like most schools who are caught in the current China heat, CS's school chooses to use *pinyin* and simplified characters rather than the variety of Taiwan. CS accepts the dominance of the variety that is different from her own as an institutional choice and "follow[s]" the textbook designated to her. However, the phenomenon of linguistic varieties in Mandarin does not appear to concern the Initial Teacher Training course CS has received because "it was not taught on [her] PGCE course". The negligence of this crucial part of the language expertise for Mandarin teachers points alarmingly to the downplay of the subject matter knowledge in ITT, as identified in Shulman's (1986) "missing paradigm". It implies a "fallacy" assumption (Phillipson, 1996) that speakers of Chinese (if taken in a multilingual sense) automatically have the discipline knowledge needed for its teaching. At the same time, the disregard of multiple practices in Mandarin underscores the tendency to group Chinese as a single ethnolinguistic community (Blommaert, 2005). Both ideologies exert a monolingual discourse that ignores CS's linguistic identity. Yet she seems able to see this in a positive light by regarding it as a matter of knowledge gap that can be resolved by self-helping, such as devising a reference for teaching, and "tak[ing] it easy". The "there-is-no-problem" approach is also taken by her school. Presumably, with a native status suggested by her Taiwanese background and her PGCE qualification, CS is deemed to possess the desirable hardware for Mandarin teaching. Still she demonstrates full awareness of the specific language knowledge that is needed for her Mandarin teaching at school. CS's above remark indicates her submission to the power of the institutional discourse in Mandarin teaching by affiliating herself to the dominance of the favoured variety of the language.

Talks of language expertise also occurred with JZ and WW, teachers from China, on various occasions, two of which are representative of their concerns. I compare these below. The former is JZ's reflection on her teaching when offered the job by her current school; the latter are comments made by WW during an interview for the Hanban survey.

Normally it feels easy when I speak Mandarin, so I haven't really given much thinking about how to teach it. But in the process of teaching, I come to realise that I am not that clear with certain things, like how to explain "ba" structure, how to teach characters. Teaching speaking only just can't do. There are always pupils asking questions about grammar. I have to rack my brain to come up with answers, otherwise how do I teach?

(Vignette 3 JZ, July 2007)

I don't think my language foundation is bad, but from my experience it is not easy to teach well. I would like to see more training aimed at the knowledge of Mandarin language and culture and systematic teaching about phonology, syntax and characters. The trainings here are always about the CLT. There is hardly any chance to make up

the knowledge about the language itself. I personally think that is the base of Mandarin teaching and what is lacking most for Mandarin teachers

(Vignette 4 WW, May 2007)

JZ's talk highlights that her teaching process is a steep learning curve in which she discovers gaps in both taken-for-granted linguistic knowledge, what "normally feels easy" to her as a native speaker, and pedagogical knowledge of "how to". The need to bridge this gap, in her view, comes from two directions. It is necessary for the curriculum in the long run as "teaching speaking only just can't do". Meanwhile, it is required by the immediate classroom pressure from pupils who "always… [ask] questions about grammar". Yet there is an unspoken assumption about her subject knowledge from the school as little preparation was given when JZ was offered her current job, and she seems to look for intrinsic reasons to account for the difficulties she has, as she blames herself for not "being clear with certain things" or "giving much thinking about how to teach it" and relies on herself – "rack[ing] [her] brain" – as the main resources for solutions. This signifies her conformity to the "native speaker fallacy" (Phillipson, 1996) that is held by her school.

Unlike JZ, WW seems to draw a line between her knowledge of Mandarin as a native speaker – "language foundation", and as a teacher – "to teach well". Her reflection suggests a strong emphasis on "systematic" knowledge about language as "the base of Mandarin teaching". It is an articulation of a personal need to "make up" as well as the belief that teachers' content knowledge amounts to good teaching, which echoes the focus on knowledge and subject content in the Chinese culture of learning (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006). Not only does pedagogical training seem less significant to her, her talk of these being "always about the CLT" is a criticism of the absence of subject matter and the dominance of the western methodology, a general approach in Mandarin teacher training in Britain as observed through her "experience".

Both JZ and WW's words express a need for language expertise in Mandarin. Whilst JZ's need reflects belief in the inherent knowledge a native speaker has for teaching, WW seeks more content-based language knowledge for teaching. The lack of training in this area exhibits the common assumption of native Mandarin speakers' expertise in teaching the language, which JZ seems to conform to and WW shows resistance against.

What we hear are collective expressions of a lack of language expertise in Mandarin teaching as both discipline and pedagogical knowledge, albeit this need for individual teachers is conditioned by different reasons and at varied degrees. TG's lack of literacy skills in Mandarin is obscured by his oral competence, his visible Chinese ethnicity, and perhaps even his QTS status. CS's quest for *pinyin* and simplified characters of Mandarin accentuates the relevance of variation in Mandarin's writing system. JZ and WW are faced with the question of transferring tacit knowledge of Mandarin of a native speaker into systematic understanding of the language that will inform their teaching. These perceptions of teaching expertise are bound to the ideologies of language and its interrelation with ethnicity and politics.

4.2 Standardisation in Mandarin and Teachers' Status

Another salient theme emerging from the teachers' talk surrounds the standardisation of Mandarin and its influence on their perceptions of teacher status. Two general tendencies can

be observed: firm alignment to the prestige of Beijing accent and discrimination towards non-standard variations. One of the most striking accounts is WW's view about the role of accent in teaching:

One of the first things in teacher training is to standardise the pronunciation. It's very messy nowadays with accents from all over the place. How can students learn well? Their ears are still clean. What we let them hear must be the purest Beijing accent. If it is messed up it can't be corrected.

Vignette 5 WW, May 2007

For WW who comes from Beijing, having standard pronunciation is a compulsory expertise for Mandarin teachers. Not only does she attach great importance to accent, WW emphasises the "*purest*" Beijing accent. Other accents in Mandarin are deemed as "messy" therefore are not "clean" for students' ears and must be "corrected". What makes a teacher, as she indicates, is to acquire standard accent through training and to goal-keep the purity of the accent for students and not letting it "messed up". This is an unambiguous affirmation of the "linguistic purism" as the national identity and cultural totem that is instilled by the state policy of China (Li, 2004). The prestige of Beijing accent is also acknowledged by TG and CS who were educated outside China, as can been seen below:

While chatting with you, I can brush up Mandarin and learn some and Beijing accent. Isn't it called "yi jü liang de" (kill two birds with one stone)?

Vignette 6 TG, June 2007

His presentation was fairly fluent, but the pronunciation was not very standard, like retroflex and non-retroflex initials. I can't pronounce these accurately either, but I paid particular attention to correcting his pronunciation. And the tones, in training I always wrote the tone marker above each character and then correct him again and again. But his mark was very low. Perhaps the judges were all from the mainland. But I once asked a friend from Beijing to listen to his recording and he said it was fine.

Vignette 7 CS, May 2007

TG shows admiration towards Beijing accent as he regards it as an additional aspect of Mandarin that he can "brush up" and it can be learnt by talking to someone from China. If this inclination to Beijing accent is to subconsciously take on a "brushed up" identity outside the classroom, CS's effort in bringing her pupil's pronunciation as close as possible to the standard accent for a speaking competition seems an apparent alliance with it in teaching. Despite that the phonological feature of the retroflex initials is absent in Taiwan's Mandarin (Bradley, 1992; Li, 2004), CS "paid particular attention to correcting" these and even "asked a friend from Beijing" to verify the pupil's pronunciation. Her making connection between the pupil's low mark with the judges' place of origin, mainland China, confirms that Beijing accent is the norm in teaching and she strives to conform to it.

As discussed earlier, desire for an idealised common language amongst macro Chinese communities is enabled by the powerful influence of the Chinese historical and cultural heritage, which centres the ideology of unity of ethnicity through the instrument of language (DeFrancis, 1984; Norman, 1988; Ramsay, 1987). This theory goes some way to answer for WW, TG and CS's acceptance of the Beijing accent as the standard pronunciation. Its value to them as Mandarin speakers also finds expressions in their teaching. However, the pursuit for the "purest" accent of Mandarin reveals a nationalistic sentiment sponsored by political influence that others the undesirables as non-standard: JZ relates an incident at a Mandarin teachers' workshop:

As soon as a teacher from Taiwan finished talking, someone stood up and said, first you shouldn't put Taiwan's flag together with the other national flags because Taiwan is not even a country, secondly you pronounced 'zongguo' instead of 'zhongguo', with such non-standard pronunciation you can't teach very well. Her talk was about the teaching of country names and she ended up very upset.

Vignette 8 JZ, February 2007

What can be observed here is tension between the statuses of the two variations of Mandarin accompanied by political controversy between Beijing and Taiwan. As mentioned above, the variations of the initial consonants such as z- and zh- coexist in Mandarin (Bradley, 1992; Li, 2004), but one of them, in this case, is rejected for being incorrect. The claim, allegedly on pedagogical ground, is associated with political status of the region where the accent is found. Arguing for *the* Beijing accent therefore has become ideologically orientated. There is a strong intolerance and hegemonic attitude towards linguistic and political dares as the person "stood up" and declared publicly that the political concept and linguistic content of the Taiwanese teacher's pedagogy were "non-standard" therefore she "can't teach very well". Thus a discourse of "us" and "them" is constructed. Although not taking a side here, JZ's recounting of the story reveals a degree of sympathy towards the Taiwanese teacher as she stops with "she ended up very upset". It is to me the unuttered "unfortunate" that positions her away from the Taiwanese teacher. Within this "otherness", nonnative-speaking teachers is invariably othered, as indicated in CS's judgment of her nonnative colleague's teaching:

Wow, I am speechless. How can he produce such a sentence? It's incomprehensible. Do you Beijing folks really speak like that? Taiwanese definitely don't speak like this. But if he says that he learnt Mandarin in Beijing, I don't really want to say that he is wrong. Some of them can teach well. I have seen it. But to speak the truth, in terms of pronunciation I have never seen a really good one. It's something if foreigners can speak Mandarin well. Don't mention teaching it well.

Vignette 9 CS, May 2007

CS's scepticism towards the nonnative colleague's linguistic credit in Mandarin and his teacher status is based on a regional variation difference between Beijing and Taiwan. What sounds "incomprehensible" to her is in fact entirely acceptable in vernacular Mandarin of northern China. Instead of clarifying it, CS accepts the sentence because the teacher says that

"he learnt Mandarin in Beijing". This confirms the prominence Beijing speech commands to CS, hence her disapproval of his language is down to his nonnativeness. In fact, bad pronunciation alone seems to rule out nonnative teachers for CS, as she concludes that no foreigners in her knowledge speak with a good accent therefore "[i]t's something if [they] can speak Mandarin well. Don't mention teaching it well", despite her admission that "some of them can teach well".

Standardisation of Mandarin, as we have seen, is accepted by teachers as an indispensable part of teachers' subject knowledge. It is an indicator of their levels of professional expertise and, for some, an ideological tool to define teacher status. Those who possess the "correct" accent are desirable whereas those who are of distance to the standard norm are othered. Nonnative teachers are deemed less credible and less competent in the hierarchy.

4.3 Working with CLT

Teaching in schools and often alongside other languages, the teachers are confronted with the communicative approach of language teaching and the CLT-driven NC at various degrees. They talk about the way they work with CLT differently too, demonstrating dissimilar understandings and stances. For TG, who is new to language teaching, CLT is a concept that he is eager to adopt:

I am not an MFL, so I visited French and Spanish classes. They were quite good. More communication in the classroom will give students more opportunities to say one or two sentences in Mandarin. And it creates a good atmosphere.

Vignette 10 TG, May 2007

Based on the model of the mainstream MFL classes who implement the NC with a strong focus on speaking through transactional and situational speaking in the target language, TG's main interpretation of CLT is "communication". In his opinion, it elicits good atmosphere through more opportunities for speaking, therefore is ideal for his Mandarin classes as an extra-curriculum provision. Unlike TG, who is keen to promote good atmosphere in his class through more communication, WW has reservations about this approach:

CLT suits teachers in this country more. They attach more importance to fun in learning. Like French, there are many resources, so it's good to play games or sing and dance. It's very lively. But it doesn't work for Mandarin. There aren't such resources. Besides, that teaching style doesn't really suit a teacher of my age. Perhaps it's more appropriate for younger teachers.

Vignette 11 WW, July 2007

The benefit of CLT to WW is mainly "fun" and "lively", but she is reluctant to use it. A main reason is the east-west disparity in the culture of learning as WW distinguishes French from Mandarin and "teachers in this country" from herself. The idea of "fun in learning" through "lively" activities such as games or singing and dancing is in stark contrast with the value of taking pleasure *in* learning through diligence and hardship in Chinese culture (Leung, 2001;

Li, 2001). By using age as an excuse, WW suggests her strong belief in the traditional Chinese culture of learning even though she has lived and studied in Britain for a long time. Consequently, CLT "suits the teachers in this country more", but not her who is culturally different, therefore CLT does not suit Mandarin either. Secondly, there is the problem with resources, as WW indicates that CLT activities in French are set in motion by "many resources", but the condition is the opposite for Mandarin so there is no room for considering its use in teaching. Whilst WW's reluctance with CLT is a cultural self-othering that is assisted by the lack of resources, JZ's disfavour of CLT seems largely due to the limitations of curriculum for Key Stage (KS) 3:

CLT was always mentioned when I taught English. For passing the GCSE, Mandarin has shorter time but more content to learn than other languages. Especially for beginners, it's not enough to just speak. To grasp characters and grammar, it's necessary to keep tight control and do plenty of exercises. The pupils here are not that hardworking anyway. They wouldn't learn real things if I taught like that. If I don't work them hard in class, they won't achieve GCSE.

Vignette 12 JZ, September 2007

Although JZ has learnt from her previous training as an English teacher that CLT is a major language methodology, she sees little value of it in her new British context, as for her, learning Mandarin is not just to speak, but also to "grasp characters and grammar", which on the one hand involves explicit instruction in "awareness of and knowledge about language" that the NC does not support (Pachler, 2000: 34), and on the other hand, requires additional curriculum time and cognitive strategies of controlled and repeated learning for characters, something that is not taken into account by a NC principally designed for European languages (Wang, 2008). These curriculum constraints, in JZ's words, "shorter time but more content", have made CLT embodied in the NC uninviting in Mandarin teaching. Although JZ's attitude may contain influence from the Confucian model of learning as she emphasizes the "realness" of the content knowledge as well as teachers' "tight control" and students' "hardworking", it also is her answer to the NC's "aversion" to explicit teaching of language knowledge (Block, 2005: 175) and poor student discipline, motivation, and achievement induced by its overemphasis on child-centredness. JZ's resistance against the CLT represented in the NC can find both pedagogical and cultural reasons. Likewise, CS seems to exclude the consideration of CLT in teaching characters to KS4:

It seems that the foreign language teaching methodology doesn't really concern the question of characters. I consider drilling and testing very important, and I definitely ask students to copy. Whichever methods work, I will use them.

Vignette 13 CS, April 2008

As someone who has been through Britain's MFL PGCE training, CS's comment on CLT points not only at the defects of the NC delineated above, but more directly at the lack of Mandarin-specific methodology training on ITT courses. There is an obvious dismissal of the CLT prescribed by the NC as she asserts that "drilling", "testing" and "copying" are effective, hence valid methods for Mandarin teaching.

The talks here demonstrate the teachers' varied viewpoints about CLT in their own context, ranging from aspiration for it to rejection of it. These show the limit in the NC's capacity to address the pedagogical and cultural demands in Mandarin teaching and bring into question its scope for allowing the development of a healthy Mandarin curriculum.

4.4 Summary

So far, we have seen the four Mandarin teachers' perceptions of their professional self through their discourses about their Chinese expert status, standardisation in Mandarin and the use of CLT in schools. Patterns transpire from the analysis that the teachers tend to distance themselves from the Chinese expert status, affiliate with the notion of standardisation, and are ambivalent about the concept of CLT, albeit they identities demonstrate idiosyncratic characteristics. For TG, Mandarin is a heritage language in which he has oral competence but no literacy skills. This contradicts with the teaching expertise assumed by his ethnicity and his QTS status in another discipline, as seen in his sense of being a fake. Nevertheless, it associates him with the advantage of speaking that CLT for MFL aspires, which is also permitted by his teaching on informal extra-curriculum programmes. SC has been working with the stipulated teacher training and school teaching in Britain, through which she seems to have learnt to compromise with certain aspects of the teaching, such as to teach the language variety that is different from her own, but not the absence of methodology for instructing characters which is needed in her teaching at KS4. JZ joined Mandarin teaching in British schools as a native-speaker and a CLT-trained language teacher. Although endorsing the expert status given, she is not in alignment with the curriculum structure of Mandarin teaching at KS3 furnished by the NC. WW, finally, having mainly taught Mandarin as a community language outside mainstream schools, sees herself strongly attached to particular traditions and values in Chinese society. The similarities and differences in these teachers' self-positioning produce multiple voices of conforming, reconciling, distancing and opposing, based on their understanding of the subject they teach, the pedagogy they deploy and the environment in which their teaching takes place. The multi-subjectivity and multi-vocality of the teachers serve as their "acquired system of generative schemas" (Bourdieu, 1977: 95) and their orientations towards "orders of indexicality" (Blommaert, 2005), via which we establish structural discourses of Mandarin teaching. It is this I now turn to.

5. Discussion

The narratives outlined above have ascended from the everyday living and teaching of four Mandarin teachers. Though anecdotal, these "snippets of talk" (Georgakopoulou, 2006), as we have seen, demonstrate logical relations and help organise the teachers' everyday and professional experiences into a structure through which we are given a glimpse of who these teachers are and how they develop a sense of self in their professional world. From different perspectives, the teachers' multiple, hybrid identities go some way to construct a converging ideological representation of Mandarin teaching that is equally imbued with tension and controversy, as outlined below.

A most prominent inconsistency is the teachers' assumed expert status against their verbalisation of a lack of expertise in Mandarin teaching. This accentuates the widespread "fallacy" that postulates native speakers' professional knowledge in teaching a language. Such is not a mere misbelief about the entailment of teachers' professional knowledge in which the distinction between intuitive knowledge of a language, knowledge about it as a discipline and knowledge and skills of teaching it is easily forgotten, it is attached to

misconceptions of native speakership and ethnicity. Notwithstanding that these teachers share a common speech and ethnic category, they show a broad spectrum of knowledge and values about the language and its literacy practice. The miscellaneous backgrounds of the teachers who are communally subjected to the brand "native speaker" suggest an unproblematised approach to the linguistic and cultural diversity of Mandarin teachers at an institutional level. This clashes head-on with the reality in schools where prestige is given to a particular variety of the language in question. The conflicting discourses jointly create a stereotype of the Mandarin teachers' community consisting of a monolithic linguistic and cultural group based on their ethnicity. The consequence of this is a rift in understanding between who Mandarin teachers are supposed to be and who they are, hence what they are supposed to know and what they know. The latter, manifested in classrooms, is a visible gap in teacher knowledge and teachers' dislocated sense of professional self.

The mistaken expert status of Mandarin speakers, in the meantime, is interrelated with the controversy about the language of Mandarin itself. As discussed previously, Mandarin *per se* is a granted standardisation that consents to the superiority of one language above others, given the various historical, cultural and linguistic conditions in Chinese society. This ideology is intensified by the external and internal political need for a purified form of Mandarin as not only a cultural but also a national totem, by which a stratifying hierarchy of multiple practices in Mandarin is formed and speakers of different regions are positioned correspondingly. Mandarin, in this sense, represents "an imagined and essentialised discourse of (national) Self and Other" (Davison & Lai, 2007). The current boom of Mandarin in British education, and often as an elitist subject in schools, is directly related to Britain's inclination towards China for its political economic interest. Such a stance is, though unwittingly, an invitation of this discourse, which is at odds with the multilingualism and plurilingualism that aim to de-centre the notion of "otherness" in education and society. As observed in this study, the bias in schools towards a particular form of Mandarin associated with the mono ethnolinguistic and ethno-national discourse has reinforced the othering of the "non-standard" and "incorrect". Again, these issues underpinning Mandarin teaching are received with an umproblematised approach that the present ITT programmes appear to have taken by disregarding the language of Mandarin as a component of subject knowledge training. The gap this has created is not only in the provision of teacher knowledge and a critical awareness of the subject, but also in the nurturing of a professionalism that is in line with the multilingual and plurilingual discourses required by the socio-political changes in the society.

Latched to this, there is a further tension with the methodology for Mandarin teaching in schools, which puts forward the matter of the NC as a central parameter culturally and pedagogically. We have seen accepting and rejecting of the so-called CLT from the teachers to varying degrees and for different reasons: TG's endorsement of it for the benefit of speaking in his teaching; WW's reluctance to use it as an alienation from her cultural perceptions of learning as well as a restriction of the availability of teaching resources; JZ and CS's dismissal of it for failing to support the teaching to prescribed standards, especially the teaching of characters in Mandarin. These competing discourses infer mixed vigour CLT wields in Mandarin teaching. For TG and WW, whose teaching is predominantly outside of the NC, CLT functions as a notional guideline that they have the liberty to choose or refuse in accordance with their personal preference and enactment of language teaching. Whereas JZ and CS, who teach Mandarin at KS3 and KS4, are dealing with "the official discourse of CLT", that is, the NC of MFL as "an educational discourse that trivialises language teaching via an emphasis on the use of games and 'fun' activities and relatively little attention to

language as a formal system" (Block, 2000: 24). This CLT, as criticised earlier for undervaluing development of knowledge and rigour in education, displays great discrepancy with the Confucian model of learning that emphasises an epistemology of a body of well-defined knowledge structure and expectation of learners' inner desire for knowledge, good discipline and diligence. It, in the meantime, disparages rote-learning and memorisation which are indispensable in supporting character acquisition thus creating a pedagogical deficiency in the NC (Wang, 2008). The tension concerning the methodology of Mandarin teaching is another marker of a discourse moving away from "ethnocentrism, cognitive flexibility, behavioural flexibility, cultural knowledge, and inter-personal sensitivity" necessary for language education to foster an "international citizenship" (Whitehead & Taylor, 2000: 380).

The contrast in the vigour of CLT, on the other hand, demarcates an indiscriminating attitude towards the pedagogy for Mandarin as a foreign and a community/heritage language in British schools which, as Anderson (2008) argues, is counter-effective for bilingual development. Whilst it is suggested that the NC shift to a "post-communicative" approach (Pachler, 2000) with more attention to grammar and knowledge about language, community/heritage language education considers an interactionist position more beneficial with meaning-focused communication fostering intercultural competence and identity investment, which is cognitively and affectively more appropriate for bilingual/bicultural learners with "high levels of competence with regard to both oracy and literacy" in the language (Anderson, 2008: 79). The current Mandarin teaching's lack of attention to this distinction is a manifestation of inadequacy in addressing Chinese heritage pupils' linguistic and cultural resources for developing a "linguistic repertory" (see Pachler, 2007) or providing "a positive affirmation of [their] cultural, linguistic and personal identities" (Anderson, 2008: 86), thus perhaps a let-down to the plurilingual spirit British education is seeking.

To summarise, what we see is an intersection of conflicting and competing discourses that are operating in the current teaching of Mandarin in schools, which allow us to (re)assess this field at a micro and macro level. Against all the effort in justifying a socio-political, economic and conceptual need for cultural and linguistic diversity in Britain at the official and academia level, some of these discourses come dangerously close to a monolingual ideology, exercising denial and suppression upon the hybridity and diversity in notions of which language, which culture and which pedagogy.

As we have seen, the community of Mandarin teachers are far from being a monolithic linguistic or cultural group as suggested by its name or the visible ethnicity it conjures up. Neither can Mandarin be mistaken for a context-free, ideology-less and unpoliticised object when introduced to a language education that is the opposite. There are, as a matter of fact, notably varying beliefs and practices *in* Mandarin and *about* Mandarin culturally, linguistically, and pedagogically. Failure to recognise these risks not only undermining the development of a holistic and inclusive curriculum, but also instigating social stereotype and stigma. This recognition seems even more necessary when the current policy and practices in Mandarin education in Britain are displaying simplistic and unproblematised mentalities behind the importation of package deals of language and language teachers as a way to counter the critical teacher shortage and a prevailing climate of "negativity" that emits cultural and linguistic "otherness".

The burgeoning Mandarin provision in British schools is already faced with programmatic problems such as qualifications and training of teachers and the appropriateness of standards,

pedagogy and resources (CILT, 2007; Wang & Higgins, 2008). Though some of these may well be resolved temporarily by local and *ad hoc* measurements from individual or regional institutions, with world-significant and far-reaching changes in the economic power distribution as well as an increasing outcry for greater political and social integration within the European community, there seems no better time to put in the agenda a more deliberate and well thought through Mandarin language ecology that is sustainable in the long run. To this end, it is essential that Mandarin teaching is kept in the picture of the wide debate and policy making of language education. What this study offers is insight into the *status quo* of Mandarin teaching in British schools from the teachers' perspective, which I hope serves reference for future research of Mandarin curriculum and teacher education as well as relevant inquiries that add to its understanding as an educational and social phenomenon.

With 2008 being the International Year of Languages, it seems more than appropriate to conclude this essay with Bourdieu's (1977) observation that "[l]inguists are right in saying that all languages are linguistically equal; they are wrong in thinking they are socially equal" (p. 652), an adage that we all need to reflect on in the current context of globalisation and multiculturalism and multilingualism.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Additional Sources

i. Government Documents

CILT (2006a) *Positively Plurilingual: The Contribution of community languages to UK education and society.* www.cilt.org.uk/pdf/pubs/positively_plurilingual.pdf

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ii. Articles from the media on Mandarin teaching in schools:

1) BBC News (http://news.bbc.co.uk):

School language decline continues (Learning a modern language beyond the age of 14 is now compulsory in only a quarter of England's state secondary schools, a survey suggests), 2 November 2005

Mandarin learning soars outside China, 9 January 2007

Seven-year-olds to take languages (Mondern foreign language lessons are to be compulsory for the first time in England's primary schools), 12 March 2007

2) COI (http://nds.coi.gov.uk):

Johnson backs Dearing's blueprint for a renaissance in language learning, the DfES national news published by the Central Office of Information, News Distribution Service for Government and the Public Sector on 12 March 2007, http://nds.coi.gov.uk

3) The Guardian:

Schools want to drop language teaching, 22 November 2002

Learn a language: Mandarin or New Labour, 21 January 2005

Mandarin for starter (Its not only independent schools that are taking up the challenge of teaching Chinese), 31 January 2006

Why bother learning foreign languages? (If politicians and teachers' leaders don't act now, language teaching in schools is going to continue getting worse.) 13 October 2006

Reports reveal extent of school language crisis, 1 November 2006

The journey starts here (As modern foreign language provision will be required for all key stage 2 children by 2010, primary schools are starting to introduce a more global theme to their teaching), 14 November 2006

Never mind French & Spanish… 2 April 2007

How's your Mandarin these days? 3 April 2007

4) The Independent:

Education Quandary: *Would it be useful for my children to learn Chinese? Where can they get lessons?* 13 October 2005

Leading Article: Light at the end of languages tunnel. 9 February 2006

Schools to teach all pupils Mandarin, 17 January 2007

Schools import China's teachers for lessons in 'language of tomorrow' by Richard Garner. Thursday 24 May 2007.

Language of the future: why Mandarin Chinese is taking off in schools, 5 July 2007

5) The Times:

National need for language learning (a letter from Mary Gore-Booth, the President of the Institute of Linguists), 30 October 2002

GCSE grades soar as heads admit to playing the system, 26 August 2005

Teach "Useful Mandarin" schools told, 14 December 2006

School French may make way for Mandarin, 4 February 2007

Mandarin propose Mandarin for new curriculum, 5 February 2007

Appendix 2: Biographies of Informants

TG (Male): Born in a Malaysian Chinese family where Cantonese and Mandarin were spoken, TG spent most of his life time in London where he attended all his education before pursuing a career as a secondary English teacher. He started running Mandarin classes in his school at his headteacher's request in 2007. TG speaks Mandarin, but does not read or write in Chinese. Although holding a QTS status, he had no prior training or experience in Mandarin teaching.

JZ (Female): Studied and trained in China, JZ was an experienced and highly-regarded teacher of English in a secondary school in Canton. She came to teach Mandarin in England in 2006 on a language assistant programme and subsequently took employment with a London school where she is now teaching Mandarin to KS3 pupils. JZ speaks Mandarin and reads and writes simplified characters with *pinyin*. She had no prior training or experience in Mandarin teaching.

CS (Female): After completing a PGCE in Mandarin teaching in 2007, CS is currently teaching KS4 in a specialist language college in London. Coming from Taiwan, CS speaks Mandarin and reads and writes traditional characters with *zhuyinfuhao*. She has no other training or experience in Mandarin teaching.

WW (Female): Emigrated from Beijing 18 years ago, WW has nearly 8 years' experience in teaching Mandarin in a supplementary school and casual Mandarin instruction. She is currently teaching a KS4 class and an after-school class in two different schools. WW was a teacher of Chinese in China. She has received some training in language teaching in England.

Appendix 3: Teachers' Narratives in Mandarin and English

Vignette 1, TG, June 2007

抱歉可以说中文吗？我希望有机会多讲一点，不然就全忘记了。在家？我最多讲一点广东话。中文应付一下还可以啦。其实我的中文真的很糟。我们学校就我一个华人，我的老板抓住我, 我也没有办法。我觉得自己是在骗人．哈，骗人！真的，我都不怎么读和写字的。我不知道教什么。 你教他们什么？我完全没有概念，很心烦的 。

Sorry can we switch to Mandarin? I want to have the chance to speak it more. Otherwise I will forget it all. At home? I at most speak a bit Cantonese. I get by in Mandarin. Really my Mandarin is quite poor. I am the only Chinese in my school. My boss got hold of me and I can't do much about it. I feel as if I was cheating. Ha, cheating! It's true. I don't really read or write characters. I don't know what to teach. What do you teach them? I have no idea. How frustrating.

Vignette 2, CS, October 2007

这样子我会很快认得拼音。其实拼音不难，可是我们的 PGCE 课上是不教的，所以我只好自己学。简体字也是一样。不过慢慢来，还好啦。反正我们应该按书教的， 一般都没有问题。

This way I will recognise pinyin very quickly. Pinyin is not really difficult, but it was not taught on our PGCE course, so I have to teach myself. The same is with simplified characters. But I take it easy and it's fine. We are supposed to follow the textbooks anyway, so generally speaking there is no problem.

Vignette 3 JZ, July 2007

平时自己说汉语觉得很容易，并没有想过怎么去教它。可是在教的过程中才发现有一些东西我也不是很明白，比如"把"字句怎么解释，汉字怎么讲啊？光教说还是不行的，总有学生会问语法方面的问题，自己要动脑筋去找答案，不然怎么教呢？

Normally it feels easy when I speak Mandarin, so I haven't really given much thinking about how to teach it. But in the process of teaching, I come to realise that I am not that clear with certain things, like how to explain "ba" structure, how to teach characters. Teaching speaking only just can't do. There are always pupils asking questions about grammar. I have to rack my brain to come up with answers, otherwise how do I teach?

Vignette 4 WW, May 2007

我觉得自己的语言功底不差，可是从我的经验来讲要教好不容易。要是有培训我希望能有针对汉语语言文化知识方面的培训，系统地讲讲语音、语法、汉字。这边的培训

动不动就是交际法，基本上没有机会补习汉语本体的知识。我个人认为这是汉语教学的基本，也是目前汉语教师最缺的。

I don't think my language foundation is bad, but from my experience it is not easy to teach well. I would like to see more training aimed at the knowledge of Mandarin language and culture and systematic teaching about phonology, syntax and characters. The trainings here are always about the CLT. There is hardly any chance to make up the knowledge about the language itself. I personally think that is the base of Mandarin teaching and what is lacking most for Mandarin teachers.

Vignette 5 WW, May 2007

教师培训先要正音。现在都乱了，五湖四海什么音都有。那学生怎么学得好呢？他们的耳朵是干净的，给他们听的应该是最纯正的京音，不要听杂了就纠不过来了。

One of the first things in teacher training is to standardise the pronunciation. It's very messy nowadays with accents from all over the place. How can students learn well? Their ears are still clean. What we let them hear must be the purest Beijing accent. If it is messed up it can't be corrected.

Vignette 6 TG, June 2007

跟你聊一聊，我可以提高汉语也学学北京的发音。这是叫一举两得吧。

While chatting with you, I can brush up Mandarin and learn some Beijing accent. Isn't it called "yi jü liang de" (kill two birds with one stone)?

Vignette 7 CS, May 2007

他的表达还比较流利， 可是发音不是很标准, 比如平舌跟卷舌，我也发得不很准，可是我特别注意纠正他的发音。还有音调，我在训练的时候总是把每个字的调都标在字上面， 然后一遍一遍地纠正他。可是他的得分给得很低。好像评委都是大陆的人吧。可是我曾经请一个北京的朋友听过他的录音，他说还不错的。

His presentation was fairly fluent, but the pronunciation was not very standard, like retroflex and non-retroflex initials. I can't pronounce these accurately either, but I paid particular attention to correcting his pronunciation. And the tones, in training I always wrote the tone marker above each character and then correct him again and again. But his mark was very low. Perhaps the judges were all from the mainland. But I once asked a friend from Beijing to listen to his recording and he said it was fine.

Vignette 8 JZ, February 2007

一个台湾来的老师发完言后，马上有人站起来说，首先你不应该把台湾的旗子和其他国旗放在一起，因为台湾根本不是一个国家，其次你把“中国” 说成 “宗国”, 发音这样不准教不好学生的。她讲的是教国名嘛，结果很生气。

As soon as a teacher from Taiwan finished talking, something stood up and said, first you shouldn't put Taiwan's flag together with the other national flags because Taiwan is not even a country, secondly you pronounced 'zongguo' instead of 'zhongguo', with such non-standard pronunciation you can't teach very well. Her talk was about the teaching of country names and she ended up very upset.

Vignette 9 CS, May 2007

哇，我无语啊。他怎么会说出这样的句子来。这完全听不懂嘛。你们北京人真的是这样说的吗？ 台湾人一定不会这样讲的。可是既然他说他是在北京学的汉语，我也不好去说他说错了。他们教得好的也有，我见过的。可是说真的，发音方面我还没有见过一个真正好的。 外国人要讲好汉语就不错了，不要提教好汉语。

Wow, I am speechless. How can he produce such a sentence? It's incomprehensible. Do you Beijing folks really speak like that? Taiwanese definitely don't speak like this. But if he says that he learnt Mandarin in Beijing, I don't really want to say that he is wrong. Some of them can teach well. I have seen it. But to speak the truth, in terms of pronunciation I have never seen a really good one. It's something if foreigners can speak Mandarin well. Don't mention teaching it well.

Vignette 10 TG, May 2007

我不是 MFL，所以去看过法语和西班牙语的课，觉得很不错。课堂里面有多一些的 communication，会让学生有机会多说一两句汉语， 也会很有气氛。

I am not an MFL, so I visited French and Spanish classes. They were quite good. More communication in the classroom will give students more opportunities to say one or two sentences in Mandarin. And it creates a good atmosphere.

Vignette 11 WW, July 2007

交际教学法适合于这边的老师，他们比较注重寓教于乐。象法语课，东西挺多的，做做游戏，唱唱跳跳也好，很活泼，但是汉语不行，没有这些教辅教材。而且象我这样年纪的老师不太适合那样的风格，年轻人可能可以。

CLT suits teachers in this country more. They attach more importance to fun in learning. Like French, there are many resources, so it's good to play games or sing and dance. It's very lively. But it doesn't work for Mandarin. There aren't such resources. Besides, that teaching style doesn't really suit a teacher of my age. Perhaps it's more appropriate for younger teachers.

Vignette 12 JZ, September 2007

以往教英语的时候也常说要用什么交际法。但是要考 GCSE, 汉语比其他外语时间短，要学的东西多，特别是初级，光说几句还不够，要过汉字关，练语法，就要抓得紧，多练习。加上这边的学生本来就贪玩，这样子教学不到什么真东西。课上不盯紧点儿，考不到 GCSE 的。

CLT was always mentioned when I taught English. For passing GCSE, Mandarin has shorter time but more content to learn than other languages. Especially for beginners, it's not enough to just speak. To grasp characters and grammar, it's necessary to keep tight control and do plenty of exercises. The pupils here are not that hardworking anyway. They wouldn't learn real things if I taught like that. If I don't work them hard in class, they won't achieve GCSE.

Vignette 13 CS, April 2008

外语教学法好像不考虑汉字的问题，我是比较注重操练和检测的，一定要要求学生抄写，反正什么方法起作用我就用什么方法。

It seems that the foreign language teaching methodology doesn't really concern the question of characters. I consider drilling and testing very important, and I definitely ask students to copy. Whichever methods work, I will use them.